ZAKATNEWS

ZAKAT FOUNDATION of AMERICA

The Leader in Empowering Lives through Zakat



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OUR MISSION

Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) is an international charity organization that helps generous and caring people reach out to those in need. ZF fosters charitable giving to alleviate the immediate needs of poor communities and to establish long-term development projects that ensure individual and community growth.

Zakat News is a free triannual publication from ZF.

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SOCIAL NETWORKS





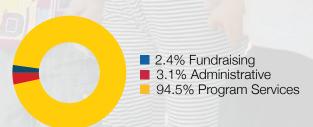






A PARTNER YOU CAN TRUST

ZF takes pride in careful management and distribution of funds raised. In 2012, 94.5 cents of every dollar went directly into our programs.



Dear Friend,

Asaalamu alaykum (Peace be upon you),

In the 12 years since Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) was founded by a small number of Muslims hoping to improve the lives of the poor around the world, we have continually reached out to new geographical and humanitarian areas. In the past months this growth accelerated thanks to our new Chief Operations Officer and General Counsel, Safaa Zarzour.

Mr. Zarzour comes to ZF after years working with the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). His special talents proved exceedingly useful on his recent trips to Syria as he scrutinized the delivery of aid to displaced and refugee Syrians and evaluated their needs.

Thanks to the support of the entire ZF home office in Chicago, I have been able to visit Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Jordan, Turkey, Syria and Mali in recent months. My experiences have deepened my personal commitment to providing services in the most difficult areas, the most desperate circumstances and the places that other organizations shy away from.

Mr. Zarzour's visit took him deep into Syria. He traveled into remote areas, slept in caves alongside those who have been left destitute by the ongoing conflict, and reported back on needs that no organization is even close to addressing.

As you, our supporters know, our commitment at ZF goes far beyond meeting emergency needs with a "band-aid" approach. We understand that whether precipitated by war or natural disaster, the stage for humanitarian crises is almost always set by extreme poverty and lack of access to education.

ZF is working on those fundamental problems through sustainability programs that build skills, resilience and independence in poor communities. In the slums of Bangladesh, one of the world's poorest countries, ZF is teaching women to sew and providing them with sewing machines that they can use to earn a living. During Ramadan this year, thanks to the generosity of our donors, ZF donated 100 rickshaws to impoverished Bangladeshi families, giving them a way to earn a livelihood.

With the blessings of Allah (*swt*) and the combined efforts of our administrative staff, response teams around the world, and you, our donors, we are working together to raise the fallen, enrich the poor, heal the sick and shelter the destitute. Please keep us in your prayers and continue your generous offering of zakat and sadaqa so that these goals may become reality.

Wassalamu Alaykum, Whalil Domir, Khalil Demir, Executive Director



Mali—Khalil Demir plays with a Malian child.



Mali—Khalil Demir meets with the new Malian president, Aboubakr Ibrahim Keita, and discusses ZF's humanitarian efforts in Mali.

From the Field:

THE STRENGTH OF THE SYRIAN SPIRIT AMID CONFLICT



Above:
Safaa Zarzour,
standing 30 yards
away from where
bombs hit, holds
the nephew of
a 60-year-old
Syrian women who
shared her story of
bombardment.

Opposite,
top-down: Food
distribution in
Golan camp;
Three refugee
girls embrace; Eid
gift distribution
in Hama was a
thumbs up with all

Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) General Counsel and Chief Operations Officer, Safaa Zarzour, visited Syria in August to evaluate ongoing programs and observe first-hand the severity of the conflict and the resulting humanitarian crisis. Mr. Zarzour visited Reef Idlib and Reef Hama, two provinces that span one third of the country, from the border of Turkey to the city of Hama. During his three-week trip, he visited towns and refugee camps in the heart of the conflict to assess the needs of the Syrian people.

Mr. Zarzour came away with a powerful impression of the Syrian people. He gave as an example a 60-year-old woman he met.

"She said to me, 'The other day, we were attacked with bombs, but thank God they did not hit us.' She pointed to a tree 30 yards away, where the bomb had fallen. As I listened to her tell me about the artillery bombardment in her neighborhood, I could not believe the remarkable adjustments she has made to her life. In that moment, it really hit me that the Syrian people are not going to leave their homes and they are not going to live in fear. Their attitude is about coping and normalizing things as much as possible."

Mr. Zarzour was amazed at the cooperation and determination of the Syrian people.

The Syrian people, he said, have created a system to distribute bread throughout the population. Since the conflict started, bakeries have been subjected to heavy bombing by fighter jets, making it unsafe for people to obtain even the most basic part of their meal.

But Mr. Zarzour explained that, "Several trucks leave early in the morning and deliver local bread to the people. In every neighborhood, there is one person designated to distribute. People knock at his door and get their allotment of bread."

But the cooperation goes far deeper than the distribution of food. Mr. Zarzour recounted a story of a man he was introduced to who had come back from the front lines to visit his family.

"Near us," Mr. Zarzour recalled, "there were two babies. One belonged to this man. As we were talking, he picked up his child, and then the other child. He looked at me and said, 'this is not my child, but I do not want her to feel left out. Her father was martyred nine months ago and she has been living with us since then."

This small interaction between a father and the child his family had taken in highlighted the way Syrian people take care of one another.

"You would think that anyone under those conditions would give up, but they do not," Mr. Zarzour explained. "For a place with no services and no authority, it is remarkably safe and peaceful. People understand that their survival matters and get along to make sure their lives are okay and that they have their necessities."

But despite the strong spirit of cooperation, living conditions within Syria remain highly unstable for Syrian families. According to Mr. Zarzour, the Syrian government has implemented a "scorched earth" policy, meaning that any cities outside the control of the Syrian government are bombed aggressively by fighter jets over heavily populated civilian areas.

"You do not have to know the policy to witness it on the ground," Mr. Zarzour said. People have fled the cities and moved to temporary refugee camps or hiding places such as caves for safety. However conditions in these areas are nearly unbearable because resources are stretched incredibly thin.

In his visit to Golan refugee camp, Mr. Zarzour saw 800 to 1000 people sharing four bathrooms, two kitchens, and two showers. The scorching heat also made it impossible for families to stay in their tents, which heat up during the day.

In another town, Mr. Zarzour found people taking refuge in caves on abandoned farmland, but they had no way to meet their most basic needs. "They do not have anything, not even water. They wait for someone to bring them food on a regular basis," Mr. Zarzour said.







Mr. Zarzour explained that the most pressing needs for the Syrian people are bread, water, energy, safety and medicine.

"Because of a lack of medicine," he said, "kids are dying from diseases that never used to be fatal. Treatable conditions like diabetes and heart issues are worsening because they do not have access to the medicines that would stabilize them."

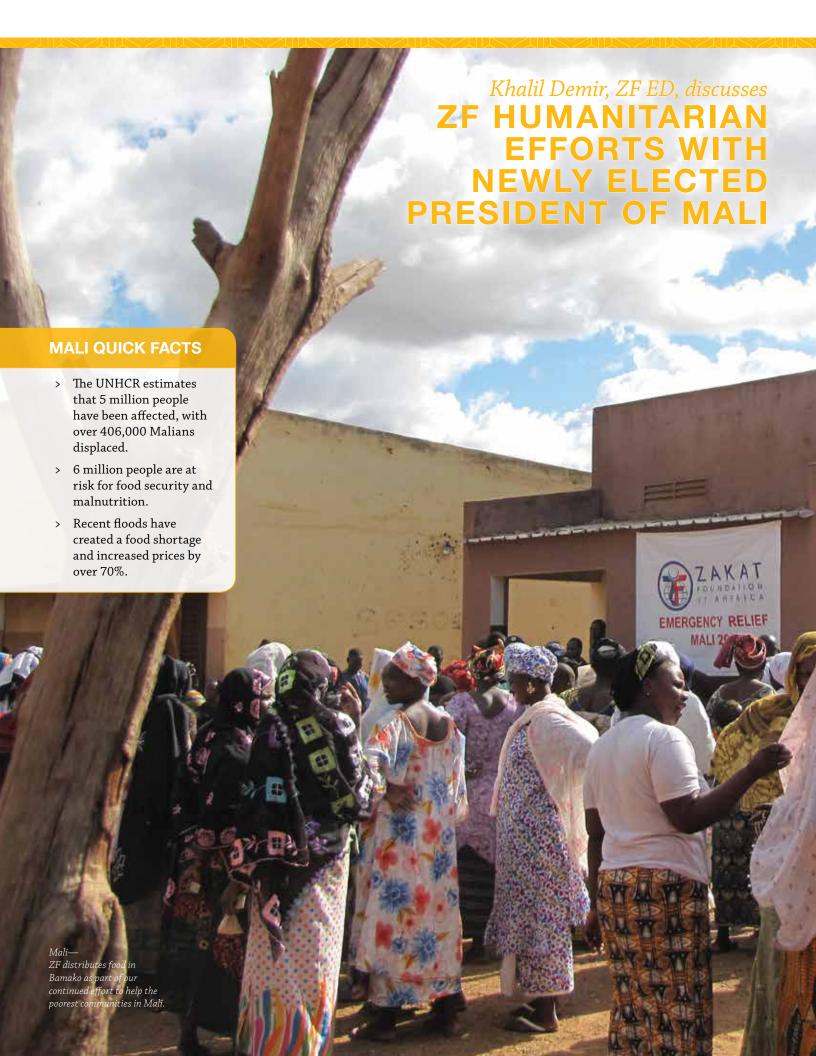
Mr. Zarzour's trip to Syria strengthened ZF's commitment to provide humanitarian aid within the country. A large majority of people who remain in Syria are suffering significant hardships. While hundreds of organizations have focused their work on helping refugees in bordering countries, there is a substantial gap of services for those who remain inside Syria. ZF is dedicated to filling this service gap in the coming months by focusing on food, water and energy security, medical aid and long-term development projects.

ZF will also strive to provide educational opportunities for Syrian children and fulfill the needs of individual communities.

While the local people in Syria work together to survive the ongoing conflict, Mr. Zarzour encourages donors like you to help ZF create a united effort to support the needs of the Syrian community.

"ZF provides many different kinds of aid. Pick the one that is closest to your heart, which you believe is a priority among priorities, and support us. Support the Syrian people."

For more information on programs in Syria and how you can make a difference, please visit zakat.org.





Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) Executive Director, Khalil Demir, visited Mali at the end of September to attend the inauguration of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. Mr. Demir wanted to explore the ways ZF can help during the ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by heavy floods in August, an 18-month civil conflict that began in January 2012, and the profound poverty of the Malian people.

After witnessing the country's many challenges, ZF has renewed its commitment to provide humanitarian aid for the Malian people by working with hospitals and United Nations agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF. ZF efforts will revolve around healthcare initiatives to address the most immediate needs. Mr. Demir found that many people do not have the means to purchase medicines, even for the most common illnesses.

"When we were at the refugee camp, we collected prescriptions to purchase medicine and found that they were written days or weeks before, but the people did not have money to buy them," Mr. Demir said.

Because many struggle to obtain the most basic medical care. ZF will focus on providing medicines and medical equipment. "After we distributed the medicines." Mr. Demir recalled, "I remember a woman who looked at us smiling while crying from joy. She told us that she had been waiting for so long and had so much pain. She almost gave up hope that she would get any medicine, but she looked at us and said, 'but we have to always believe, praise God, God will send someone."

In addition to the dire poverty he encountered, the aftermath of the floods that ravaged Bamako in August left an unforgettable impression on Mr. Demir.

"I was told a story of one woman, a mother of four, whose house became full of water. Instead of getting out of her house, she tried to close the door, so she could save herself. However, the water was so high that she was going to drown. Her neighbors tried to rescue her and the children with a rope. When it was her turn to get out, instead of grabbing the rope, since it was dark and rainy, she wrongly grabbed an electrical wire and was instantly killed."

Her children were left motherless and now depend on the community to help them survive. Local people told countless more stories of heartbreaking loss.

The sewer system in Bamako, the capital of Mali, was unable to filter the large amounts of water from the heavy rains, creating backlogs of garbage and debris in various communities. Weeks later, the areas had still not been cleaned, creating health hazards for the local people.

\ "One of the most heartbreaking experiences in Mali was seeing kids play near a drainage that was unsanitary, knowing that there was nothing preventative in place," Mr. Demir said.

> "We talked to many individuals and it was like they considered themselves forgotten because nobody came to help them."

Your generous support of humanitarian aid in Mali will bring help and comfort to these brothers and sisters, showing them and their children, that they are not truly forgotten. We are here to help.

Ramadan:

SERVING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS

Through the generosity of donors, Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) delivered more than 1.7 million meals to more than 100.000 families in 36 countries during the month of Ramadan.









In addition to providing warm meals and food packages, ZF sheltered Syrian refugees and gave Eid outfits to hundreds of orphans and children throughout the world.

As part of its ongoing sustainable development efforts, ZF unveiled two new signature programs in Bangladesh, giving away sewing machines to graduates of its seamstress course, and 100 rickshaws to slum-dwelling families. The goal of these programs is to empower the poorest families by providing them with a means of escape from poverty.

On behalf of all who received a warm Iftar, a food package, a new outfit, a safe place to rest or a new livelihood during Ramadan, and from all of us at ZF, thank you for your kind charity.







Udhiya/Qurbani:

SERVING OVER 100,000 PEOPLE IN 30 COUNTRIES

Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) has completed another successful Udhiya/Qurbani program in 30 countries across four continents. More than 100,000 people shared the joy of this prophetic tradition through the generosity of donors.

ZF concentrated its efforts in areas where people are most vulnerable and access to social services is nonexistent. In war-torn regions such as Mali, Syria and Myanmar-Burma the people subsist on staples such as rice or bread, but often go hungry. Meat is extremely scarce.

The Rohingya Muslims of Burma are one of the most persecuted groups in the world. According to Gulcheare Begum, a Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh, "If a beggar begs he gets something, but a Rohingya Muslim is neglected by all classes of people. They never get any help from others."

"But Zakat Foundation of America came to us and gave us Qurbani meat," she said. "I feel very fortunate and make dua for them. I hope that they will take more actions for Rohingya Muslim brothers and sisters like me."

Your contributions during Udhiya/ Qurbani served many people like Gulcheare for whom basic nutrition and kindness can be equally hard to come by. May Allah (*swt*) accept your charity. ■









Treading New Tracks:

CYCLING TOWARDS A NEW BEGINNING



The lives of rickshaw pullers in Bangladesh are often characterized by financial hardship and chronic poverty. Most pullers rent their rickshaw, paying more than half of their income to the owner. Thanks to the support of generous donors, this year Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) gifted 100 rickshaws to poor fathers in a community ceremony to help them provide for their families for years to come. Due to the overwhelming support of this program, ZF will distribute 67 more rickshaws in the coming months.

The following profiles highlight recipient stories that tell of the economic hardships they face and how the rickshaw will provide a secure source of income.





Bangladesh— As an Eid gift this year during Ramadan 100 beneficiaries receive rickshaws; this gift will help them provide for their families for years to come.





"I am a very poor man," he said. "After paying my rent out of whatever I earn through pulling a rickshaw, I could not provide sufficiently for my family. ZF's gift of a rickshaw has changed my life. Now I am self-sufficient. My parents and I will always make dua for ZF. Thank you." -Jewel Miah

Br. Miah has been a rickshaw puller for eight years. He lives with his wife, daughter, two sisters and parents. As a rickshaw puller, the money he earns is not enough to cover family expenses because he pays up to half his earnings to rent the rickshaw. His income is always less than his expenses, so he is never able to save.

Br. Miah assumed that he would have to rent the rickshaw for the rest of his life. However, after receiving a rickshaw from ZF, he became very emotional because he will no longer have to pay the rickshaw owner from his income. Br. Miah expressed that he feels his family will be able to rise out of poverty and live decent lives from now on.



"After prayers, I always made dua for a rickshaw of my own. At last ZF has fulfilled my dream. ZF did for me what my father could not do. I will always pray and make dua for ZF."

-Md. Abul Miah

Md. Abul Miah drives a rented rickshaw to support his two sons and daughter. One day, the rickshaw owner beat him physically over a small matter. He became very upset over the incident and decided to never drive a rickshaw again. However, without that income, he was no longer able to continue the schooling of his two sons. Instead, both sons had to take menial jobs to help the family. He worried that they would be unable to escape the vicious cycle of poverty. Br. Mia could not believe he received a rickshaw from ZF, especially at a time when his financial needs were the greatest and he was looking for an opportunity. With the money he earns, he will enroll his children in school for a to finish their studies. He has confidence that he will have a better life in the future.



"Due to a lack of money, I cannot send my children to school, nor can I buy the required medicine in times of sickness. After getting this rickshaw I am very happy. Thank you, thank you, thank you to ZF."

-Md. Azizul

Bangladesh— Three personal stories from the 100 who received a rickshaw as an Eid gift.

Br. Azizul is a rickshaw puller by profession. However, he is currently homeless. He and two of his children live with another family. His health has deteriorated due to multiple illnesses, but he is unable to afford treatment, which prevents him from being well enough to work on a daily basis or paying the rent on a rickshaw. After getting a rickshaw from ZF, Br. Azizul hopes his family's suffering will be reduced. He considers the rickshaw a great asset that he will maintain so he can provide for his children.





Sri Lanka— Graduating students from Comtech University.

Comtech University:

PROVIDING EDUCATION TO AN **IMPOVERISHED COMMUNITY**

In recent decades, Sri Lanka has accelerated its pace of development by providing free primary and secondary school to its population. But in some areas, education is less attainable.

Sainthamarathu is predominantly Muslim with a population of 600,000 people. Decades of ethnic strife, and destruction from the tsunami in 2004, have left the community without schools. Moreover, the city's farmers, laborers, and fishers do not have the means to send their children elsewhere for higher schooling. These barriers to education prevent young people from finding work that would allow them to break the cycle of generational poverty.

To address the educational needs of Sainthamarathu, Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) became the financial sponsor for Comtech University in 2009 to provide an affordable higher education opportunity for local low-income students. The vocational and technology school currently supports 302 students.

The school focuses on preparing students for highly skilled jobs in information technology, management, accounting and finance along with essential instruction in English. Upon graduating, most students receive domestic and international job offers, particularly in the Middle East, or have become self-employed.

One student, Ahamed Riyas said that Comtech provided a means for him to obtain employment in a field he was passionate about, while being able to support his family.

"My father's income [was] not enough to meet the daily costs of living," he said, "but I [was] interested in continuing my higher studies. I was able to find Comtech and after my diploma, I worked as a graphic designer part-time for a private firm."

His new part-time job allowed Riyas to cover his expenses and enroll in another program at a government technical school. Now he is working full-time for a company in Qatar.

Another student, Saleem Ajimeer said that the opportunities provided by Comtech encouraged him to pursue his studies. "I shall never forget Comtech for its encouragement at a time when I gave up the idea of continuing my higher studies."

Ajimeer's family could not afford to pay for his education. After receiving a full scholarship from Comtech, Ajimeer completed the information technology and English programs. He then furthered his education in business from the College University Islam Melaka in Malaysia and upon graduation, received a job as a computer analyst in Kuala Lampur, Malaysia.

Ajimeer and Riyas are just two examples of the many successful alumni of Comtech University. With your support, ZF hopes to continue to make possible the dreams and aspirations of Sri Lankan youth who now have a chance at a brighter future.

ZF Expands Bangladesh Orphanage:

CARING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

The Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) orphan program in Bangladesh is expanding as more orphans come under its care. ZF provides food, shelter, clothing, medical care and education to the orphan youth. To accommodate the needs of these children, ZF will purchase a new flat in Bangladesh with a full kitchen, dining hall, dormitory rooms, and lecture halls. Additionally, the facility will provide after-school programs in English, Math, and Islamic Studies to help children excel academically and spiritually.

Orphans are one of the world's most vulnerable populations. Orphan children are particularly vulnerable to poverty, forced labor, trafficking, and homelessness. According to UNICEF, there are between 143 and 210 million orphans worldwide.

Bangladesh has 61 million children under the age of 18. While it is difficult to obtain information on the exact number of orphans in Bangladesh, estimates indicate that one third of all Bangladeshi children do not have parental care, live

with a single parent or live with dislocated families in slums. For these children, day-to-day survival is a tremendous challenge; preparing for the future through education is practically impossible.

Like the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), who was himself an orphan, these young ones need loving care, protection, guidance and education in order to grow to offer their gifts to the world. Your generous donation provides them with these needs and helps ensure that they grow and flourish.

Bangladesh—
Orphans from
ZF-sponsored
orphanage gleefully
receive Eid gifts to
celebrate the end of
the holy month of
Ramadan.







Bringing hope and opportunity to the most vulnerable in society. | 2013 ZAKAT NEWS

Building Community: MOSQUE **BUILT IN GHANA**

In February of 2013, the Ghana office of Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) was approached by communities in Carpenter and Branam about the construction of an Islamic center in which these two congregations could pray, host village hall meetings to discuss community matters, and serve as a beacon of faith and community.

Through the help of Allah (swt) and the support of donors, in September 2013 construction of the mosque and community center for these two communities was completed. After months and even years of praying for a house of worship, our brothers and sisters in Ghana can proudly make the adhan from their very own mosque.

Muslims represent nearly 20 percent of the population in Ghana, and generally live with the poverty and lack of educational and job opportunities that most Ghanaians face. The ZF Ghana office has built better understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims through vocational and skills training, the construction of water wells, and a range of social services for the most marginalized communities in Ghana.

ZF is currently building three mosques in Ghana and Kenya to be completed in early 2014. For more information on our Sadaqah Jariyah programs, visit zakat.org.

Ghana-The community celebrates the opening of their new mosque.







One of the most effective and very best kinds of giving is sadaqah jariyah, literally, "running charity," called so because it "runs on" in life and after death

What is **SADAQAH JARIYAH?**

like a flowing stream. Islam lays emphasis on this type of charitable giving because its gift

bestows both the giver and the beneficiary with blessings that continue to reward recipients and the gift-maker long after the endower has died. So, if one builds a house of worship, for instance, its advantage "runs on" for its attendants and its contributor so long as worshippers pray in it—even for centuries.

Sadaqah jariyah is not limited to the building of mosques or schools or exclusive charity toward people. It encompasses innumerable things that benefit all the living. A sadaqah jariyah that is especially emphasized is one that produces a source of beneficial knowledge, like writing a book that benefits people in any worthy aspect of their lives. In this case, even after a writer dies, as long as the book is read and helping people, he or she will continue to receive reward for it.

Above:
Ghana—Women who are part of ZF cassava co-op

Bangladesh—Graduates from ZF sewing program in Bangladesh sit proudly with their Eid gift, a brand new sewing machine.

Right: Ghana—Amal Ali, Director of Youth & Community Building Initiatives, assists local woman while on ZF Service Trip to Ghana.





Zakat Foundation of America

STUDENT SERVICE TRIP TO GHANA

Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) organized a service-immersion trip to Ghana in the summer of 2013. The student travelers joined hands with Ghanaian villagers to construct a water well while learning about the global water crisis. They worked at a cassava farm co-op where they harvested and prepared cassava to be sold at a market.

They exchanged programs at a Sunyani Islamic school to share unique aspects of Muslim American culture, while the Ghanaian children presented traditional drumming, drama, and Quranic recitation. At an Ivorian refugee camp, the students consulted with the village chiefs to plan a community fair.

The students also took daily language lessons in Twi, visited national museums, hiked the Kakum rainforest reserve, tried weaving kente cloth weaving, and visited slave forts used in the tragic transatlantic slave trade.

Each day began with early dawn prayer and a spiritual talk, and concluded with group reflections. The trip begun June 23, 2013 and ended July 7, 2013. To ensure a safe experience for all student travelers, ZF instituted strong safety measures and a thorough pre-departure orientation process.

ZF Service Trips offer life-changing opportunities that educate, inspire and produce active global citizens by connecting students with ZF's sustainable development and humanitarian initiatives in underdeveloped countries around the world.

To stay informed about ZF student service-learning opportunities contact studentsforservice@zakat.org

Zakat Foundation of America

SERVICE-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES TO SCHOOLS



This fall, ZF partnered with the Webb Foundation Sunday School in Chicago to run a servicelearning program. Through the ZF curriculum, Webb students have been paired up with an Islamic school in Ghana which lacks access to fresh water. The Webb students are learning about the global water crisis while discovering their change-making potential by coordinating an effort to build a water well for their partner school in West Africa.

The prophet Muhammad (pbuh) taught us that service is always a reciprocal exchange-while

USA-Students come together as part of ZF student service initiatives.

the recipients get help, the givers gain spiritual growth. Through live video conferencing, the students will meet their Ghanaian peers as they share drumming and cultural dance; they will learn what Ghanaian children do for fun, and how many meals they have per day. They will learn how their Ghanaian peers made do with their meager resources by sharing pages from the Quran in order to memorize it completely by eighth grade.

YOUTH REFLECTIONS **FROM GHANA**



"There is something very solemnly impressive and benevolent when it comes to the spirituality and devotional beliefs of the Ghanaian Muslims that I met. Free from the distractions of technologyof iPhones and iPads, the busy 9-to-5 Western career lifestyle that limits family and personal time, and, perhaps the biggest distraction of all. laziness."

—Noor Hassan



"Going to Ghana is one of the most beautiful memories I will ever know. I truly believe that Ghana is a starting point, a launching pad to fulfilling my individual and unique potential to change and be changed."

—Hannan Ouyoun



"Going to Ghana was truly a life changing experience, Alhamdulillah. Until this day. not a minute passes without me thinking of all the wonderful men, women, and children I've met."

—Ayat Musleh



"Going to Ghana gave me a grasp of what Google's endless search options never can." —Muryem Quadri

ZFCCC Creative Camp Students

TAKE HOME SELF-PORTRAITS AND SELF-ESTEEM

Tears spilled from the girl's big, brown eyes as she looked up at me. "Why did you ask me for so many good things? I can't think of that many!" I had asked her and her fellow students for 20 positive attributes, special things, things they are good at. But this seemed out of her reach. She struggled to think of one.

They all did.

My name is Chris Matusek and I am the graphic designer at Zakat Foundation of America (ZF). I have also taught art for 10 years to students of all ages, focusing on arts and crafts, ceramics, and digital art. Last summer I had the pleasure of teaching at ZF Community Center Chicago (ZFCCC) Creative Camp.

On almost any weekday of the year ZFCCC is busy with GED programs, health outreach, assistance for job seekers and a host of other programs. But on Saturdays when Creative Camp is in session, the faces and voices of South Shore's children brighten the center.

It was the second week of camp and I planned to work on selfportraits with my students, who ranged in age from seven to 14. First we looked at self-portraits by famous artists such as Frida Khalo and Van Gogh, and talked about how artists use drawing as a tool of expression.

The project involves each student making a list of 20 attributes, then drawing themselves in silhouette and filling the page with words and images that

show the child's special qualities. Usually when I ask a group to list 20 positive attributes, it takes about 30 minutes.

But this group took two hours. They lacked words to describe their beauties, talents and lovable quirks; none more than the small girl next to me. Her face showed the sheer impossibility of my request. I imagined how hard it must be to grow up in a neighborhood that struggles under a tremendous burden of poverty, crime and under-funded schools.

"Why so many?" She cried. "Why couldn't you ask for 10?"

I agreed to compromise with her and let her shorten the list. She began haltingly.

"I'm nice," she offered quietly. I helped her write it down.

ZFCCC Director Laila Muhammad soon took my place, patiently coaxing the young girl along. I moved around the room, taking time with each student. They got frustrated and complained that other students were "copying" their work. When I suggested that more than one person in the room could be good at the same thing, they were dismayed.

I thought for sure I had lost the kids' focus for good, but we pushed through. Even my despondent young friend, having reached six positive traits, demanded I allow her to list 20 of them like the other children. I consented happily.

Usually at the end of this exercise the students read their lists to the class. But most of them flatly refused to do it. I decided to skip this part and grudgingly accepted that making the lists would have to suffice for that day.

The following week we made silhouettes by shining a light on the child and tracing the child's shadow. Each student drew images of the things they are good at in the inside of their silhouette, and filled the outside with their lists of attributes.

The children enjoyed cutting out letters from magazines to spell their names, trying different techniques and materials. Their faces glowed with pride as they worked.

Over the following weeks we made other projects, thankfully none of them as challenging as the self-portrait. At the last class, when we invited the parents to come for open house, I wondered how the adults would respond to their children's work. The ceramic bowls and food collages were nice, but the self-portraits contained so many ideas and dreams; so much vulnerability.

The parents were wonderful. All ages participated together in a poetry performance. When the students talked about their favorite project, most of them proudly picked their self-portrait.

Unfortunately a couple of the parents could not make it. Their children, although proud of their projects, did not take the selfportraits home. Maybe they felt

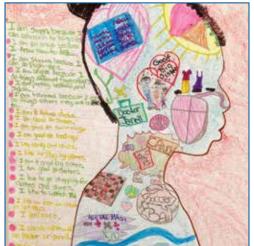
that such a personal piece of art would leave them too exposed on the walk home.

But I know that they took something important and invisible home with them. A study by the Department of Justice showed that participants in youth art programs gained skills such as expressing anger appropriately and sticking with a project from start to finish. They reported feeling better about themselves and doing better in school than children who do not participate in arts programs. And youth art program participants were less likely to break the law.*

I know that art set me on a different path than I might have traveled otherwise. Without the arts programs I loved as a child and the encouragement of friends and mentors, I never would have gone to college at all, much less grown up to become an educator and designer.

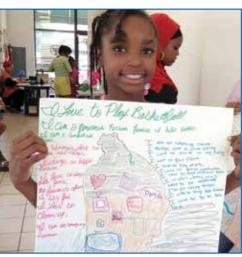
So I am thrilled that Creative Camp has started again on October 26, every Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. It is possible that among all the health and educational programming that ZFCCC delivers to the South Shore community, the thing that has the greatest potential to change the future of the neighborhood is bringing kids together and asking them to work on something beautiful that makes them proud.











*http://www.americansforthearts.org/ NAPD/files/9209/Arts%20Programs%20 for%20Youth%20At-Risk_Pamphlet.pdf

USA- ${\it Clockwise: Children \, learn \, ceramics \, in \, Creative \, Camp \, Summer \, 2013; \, One \, of \, the \, camper's \, in-progress \, self-portrait; \, Camper \, constant \,$ proudly shows off her positive attributes self-portrait; During the closing reception, a camper points to his favorite summer project; A detail of a camper's self-portrait of positive attributes.











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